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ABSTRACT

Although role or perspective taking has been consider d important for the development of mature social thought and behavior, and training for perspective taking has been used to remediate deficient behavior, few studies with either normal or disturbed populations have examined naturally occurring behaviors expected to correlate with perspective-taking ability. This study examines the relationship between perspective taking and the social behavior and affective language of 26 behaviorally disordered boys ages 5 to 12. Each subject was observed for approximately 33 minutes in lunch, freetime, and organized activity settings varying in level of structured expectations for behavior. The 12 behavior categories used in coding were designed to record the frequency and quality of the child's interaction with others, both adults and peers. Measures of perspective taking, affective language, and receptive vocabulary were administered. Instruments employed were Chandler's (1973) role-taking task; the interview from the friendship domain of the Measure of Interpersonal Understanding developed by Selman, Jaquette, and Bruss-Saunders (1979); and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test. Results indicated that perspective-takers spent less time "alone" on-task, received less attention from adults, and shared more than their non-perspective-taking peers. Perspective-takers also spent more time in neutral interaction with other children than did non-perspective-takers. Finally, perspective-takers used a greater variety of affective words in response to the Chandler role-taking measure. (Author/RH)

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Perspective-taking and Social Behavior in Behaviorally Disordered Boys[1]

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Abstract

This study was designed to examine the relationship between perspective-taking and the social behavior and affective language of behaviorally disordered chi'dren. Although role- or perspective-taking has been considered important for mature social thought and behavior (Mead, 1934; Piaget, 1959, 1965), and perspective-taking training has been used to remediate where such behavior is deficient (Chandler, 1973; Little & Kendall, 1979), few studies have examined, in either a normal or disturbed population, the naturally-occurring behaviors expected to correlate with this cognitive skill. The social behavior and affective language of 26 five- to twelve-year-old boys were observed in a number of settings at a treatment facility. The Chandler role-taking task and the Selman Friendship interview measured perspective-taking, and, for the Chandler task, use of an affective vocabulary. As predicted, perspective-takers spent less time "alone" on-task, received less attention from adults, and shared more than their non perspective-taking peers. Perspective-takers also spent more time in neutral interaction with other children than did non perspective-takers. Finally, as predicted, perspective-takers used a greater variety of affective words in response to the Chandler role-taking measure.

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One aspect of social cognition which may have important implications for the development of mature social behavior is role- or perspective-taking, the ability to infer the thoughts and feelings of others. Perspective-taking in children has been found to be related to adults' ratings of their social adjustment (Burka & Glenwick, 1978; Kurdek, 1978, 1980; Selman, 1980), and to specific prosocial behaviors measured in laboratory or semi-naturalistic situations (Hudson, Forman, & Brion-Meisels, 1982; Rubin & Schneider, 1973). Few studies have examined the relationship between perspective-taking and behavior in real-life settings. Further, though perspective-taking training has been used as a social-cognitive intervention with behaviorally disordered children (Chandler, 1973; Chandler, Greenspan, & Barenboim, 1974; Little & Kendall, 1979), even fewer studies have examined the behavioral correlates of this cognitive skill in natural settings where these disordered children function. The present study was designed to test several hypotheses concerning the relationship between perspective-taking and the naturally-occurring behavior of behaviorally disordered children.

The validation of perspective-taking in natural settings presents a theoretical challenge given the variety of behaviors theoretically linked to this cognitive skill. The following hypotheses were proposed:

- Congruent with the theoretical view that children need to interact with others in order for their perspective-taking skills to develop (Mead, 1934; Piaget, 1959, 1965), it was predicted that perspective-takers would be less likely to spend time alone on- or off-task.

- Considering the emphasis placed on peer rather than adult interaction as the arena for perspective-taking development (Piaget, 1959), it was predicted that perspective-takers would both give to and receive from adults less attention than their non perspective-taking peers.

- Considering the evidence suggesting that positive interaction with peers, e.g., cooperation, but particularly prosocial behaviors such as sharing, helping, and comforting, is related to role-taking (Bridgeman, 1981; Elardo & Caldwell, 1976; Hudson, et al., 1982), it was predicted that perspective-takers would both distribute to and receive from their peers more positive attention.

- Considering the greater complexity of affective language in "socially sensitive" children (Rothenberg, 1970), and the fact that an accurate and complex affective vocabulary has been used as a measure of perspective-taking (Waterman, Sobesky, Silvern, Aoki

& McCaulay, 1981), it was predicted that perspective-takers would use a significantly larger affective vocabulary and would use affective words more frequently, than their non perspective-taking peers, both in responding to an affectively-laden task and in their natural settings. It was expected that this relationship between perspective-taking and affective language would remain when performance on a measure of general vocabulary skill was statistically controlled.

Considering the lack of clarity regarding the relationship between perspective-taking and antisocial behavior (Elardo & Caldwell, 1976; Kurdek, 1980; Selman, 1980), no directional prediction was made as to the relationship between perspective-taking and giving negative attention to others.

Method

Twenty-six boys in a facility for treatment of behaviorally disordered children participated in this study. The boys ranged in age from 5 years, 9 months to 12 years, 2 months (mean age = 9 years, 5 months). Their intelligence was in the normal range. Most of the boys had been identified as having conduct problems (children with organic and severely psychotic difficulties are not accepted by the agency).

Cognitive Measures

Measures of perspective-taking, affective language, and receptive vocabulary were administered to individual subjects by one of two examiners in two sessions several days apart. In the first session, the child was given two perspective-taking tasks (order of tasks was counterbalanced): the Chandler (1973) role-taking task, considered one of the most reliable measures of role-taking (Enright & Lapsley, 1980), and, because this task does not test perspective-taking levels beyond the recognition of two perspectives (self and other), the interview from the friendship domain (hereinafter referred to as the Friendship interview) from the Measure of Interpersonal Understanding developed by Selman, Jaquette, and Bruss-Saunders (1979). In the Chandler task, participants were presented with three stories, each told in seven or eight cartoon frames. In each story, the protagonist experienced an affectively-laden event (e.g., sadness at the loss of a coin in a street drain) in the first several frames, at which point another character was introduced. The child was asked to retell the story from the point of view of this late-arriving bystander; perspective-taking was measured by the extent to which the subject avoided including "privileged information" from the

first several frames in his retelling. The two other stories involved protagonists who were angry or afraid. The subjects' responses were tape recorded, transcribed, and rated for perspective-taking on a five-point scale.

In the Friendship interview a "sociomoral dilemma" was presented to the child via a filmstrip. This story was then used as a stimulus to probe, in a semi-structured interview, the child's understanding of six issues in friendship (formation, closeness and intimacy, trust, jealousy, conflict resolution, and termination). The child's responses were tape recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by two judges according to the "issuing procedure" described by Selman et al. (1979). To assign a level of perspective-taking, a quantitative score (ranging from 0 to 4) was computed by averaging all issue scores.

Measures of affective language were also collected from transcriptions of audiotapes of the Chandler (1973) task: variety of affective words (the number of different words the child used to describe emotions in the affectively-laden stories), and frequency (the total number of affective words the child used in the telling and retelling of the cartoon stories).

To assess the general vocabulary level of the child, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test was administered in a second session.

Behavioral Measures

In order to develop a systematic profile of the child's interactive behavior in the treatment facility, each child was observed for a total of 33-36 minutes (in three-minute observation periods) in three different settings varying in level of structured expectations for behavior: lunch, freetime, and organized activity. Data on each child were gathered over six to eleven days and only in situations where at least one other child was present and available for interaction with the target child. An audiotape marking 10-second intervals was used to facilitate accurate recording.

Behavior categories, drawn from Gottman, Gonso, and Rasmussen (1975), were designed to capture the frequency and quality of the child's interaction with others, both adults and peers. In all, 12 categories of behavior were coded: 1) Child not interacting positive = child is not interacting but is on-task; 2) Child not interacting negative = child is not interacting and is off-task (the phrases "alone" on-task and "alone" off-task will be used to eliminate the awkwardness of the foregoing terms, although it is understood that data were collected only when another child was present and hence potentially available for interaction); 3) Gives positive

to peer = child gives approval, smiles, touches another child, complies with a request or behaves prosocially (incidents of helping, sharing, comforting, and cooperating were specifically noted); 4) Gives negative to peer = child verbally or physically threatens, swears at, derogates, kicks, or hits; 5) Receives positive from peer = child is the recipient of behaviors described in category (3) from a peer; 6) Receives negative from peer = child is the recipient of behaviors described in category (4) from a peer; 7) Entry or neutral behavior = child verbally initiates an interaction or is engaged in a neutral conversation; this category is scored only when the conversation is not apparently positive or negative (categories 3 or 4) for the focal child. Categories (8) through (12) were constructed to describe the child's interaction with adults and paralleled categories (3) through (7) above. Both verbal and nonverbal expressions of categories (3) through (12) were noted, but were combined in subsequent data analyses.

Reliability

Behavioral observations did not begin until two observers achieved a mean percentage agreement of .85 over 12 consecutive three-minute observations. To establish reliability and check for observer drift, observations with the reliability observer (37% of the total) were distributed across the subjects, settings, and time of the study. From these jointly collected data, six reliability samples were drawn (nine observations per sample), yielding Cohen's Kappas which ranged from .67 to .78. Reliability of the average of the two judges' ratings of the three Chandler stories and the Friendship interview was .97 and .88, respectively. The internal consistency of the two perspective-taking measures was examined by intercorrelating the three Chandler tasks and the six Friendship issue scores, yielding coefficient alphas of .66 and .78, respectively.

Data Analysis

For 18 subjects, 36 minutes of observational data were collected. For the remaining eight subjects, some observational data were missing; however, for each subject, there were at least 33 minutes of behavior available for analysis. Missing data were estimated from, and proportionate to, the existing behavioral data for that subject. One Friendship interview was not available for one child.

Subjects were divided into perspective-taking (n = 11) and non perspective-taking (n = 16) groups on the basis of their Chandler score (scores equal to or exceeding 3.0 were considered evidence of perspective-taking), and then compared on the various observational

measures. Because only four subjects had scores on the Selman measure exceeding 1.50, the maximum criterion score for level one perspective-taking (i.e., subjective or differentiated perspectives; Selman, Schorin, Stone & Phelps, 1983), this measure was not used to group subjects. However, both perspective-taking measures, as well as the measures of affective language and behavior, were used in subsequent correlational analyses.

Results and Discussion

As predicted, perspective-takers on the Chandler measure were found to spend less time "alone" on-task than their non perspective-taking peers ($t(24) = 2.08$, $p < .03$). In this study, if a child was not "alone" on- or off-task, he was interacting with other children or adults at the treatment facility. Presumably, children who engage in interactive behavior with others are in a sense involved with the raw material for the development of perspective-taking skill. Contrary to predictions, however, no relationship was found between perspective-taking and "alone" off-task behavior, most likely because this latter behavior occurred so infrequently as to restrict the range of scores and limit the size of the difference between perspective- and non perspective-takers.

Consistent with the theoretical emphasis placed on peer rather than adult interaction as the arena for perspective-taking development, perspective-takers on the Chandler measure were found to receive less positive attention from adults ($t(24) = 2.13$, $p < .04$), and tended to receive less negative attention from adults ($t(24) = 1.32$, $p < .10$), than non perspective-takers. This pattern of relationships was also obtained when perspective-taking measured by the Selman Friendship interview was correlated with these behavior categories ($r(23) = -.39$, $p < .03$ and $r(23) = -.27$, $p < .10$, respectively). However, contrary to predictions, giving attention to adults, whether positive or negative, was generally unrelated to perspective-taking on either the Chandler or Selman measure.

It had been predicted that perspective-taking children would both give to and receive from their peers more positive attention, since the delivery and receipt of positive attention is assumed to be associated with socially competent behavior. Contrary to predictions, however, children with higher perspective-taking scores were not different on these behavior categories than children who could not take the perspective of others. In retrospect, perhaps this result should not be surprising, considering the fact that children, particularly disordered children, may often give to and receive from their peers positive attention for negative or socially incompetent behavior. The observers in this study

were limited to coding the topography of behavior; thus, instances when the focal child smiled at or verbally gave approval to a fractious peer were coded within the same general category as those where the child gave approval for another's art work or demonstrated affection.

It was because the category of giving positive attention to peer permitted the inclusion of reinforcement for potential and actual negative behavior that this category was further defined so that specific prosocial behaviors could be noted. When scores on the Friendship interview were correlated with sharing (a particular subclass of positive interactions with peers and adults), a significant relationship was found ($r(24) = .42$, $p < .02$). Perspective-taking on the Chandler measure was marginally correlated with helping ($r(24) = .27$, $p < .09$). Results of studies relating perspective-taking to prosocial behaviors, whether rated or observed in semi-naturalistic settings, have been equivocal (see review by Smith, Leinbach, Stewart & Blackwell, in press). A criticism of previous measures of prosocial behavior in children (in particular, sharing) has been the artificial nature of the task, e.g., donation to an unseen, needy child. In this study, using an ecologically valid measure (e.g., spontaneous sharing of a snack or art materials), support for the hypothesized relationship of perspective-taking with sharing, and tentatively helping, was found.

No relationship was found between perspective-taking and antisocial behavior (i.e., giving negative attention to peers and adults). Though researchers and therapists may long for the simplicity of such a relationship, this study did not provide evidence thereof. Indeed, perspective-taking may be a very useful skill for the antisocial child.

Perspective-takers on the Chandler measures spent more time engaged in neutral interaction with their peers than non perspective-takers ($t(24) = 2.33$, $p < .02$). This result is also consistent with the notion that perspective-taking stems from interaction with others, particularly peers, i.e., children in this study who demonstrated they could "stand in the other's shoes" were children who interacted more with their peers than children less able to assume the perspective of the other.

As predicted, perspective-takers used a greater variety of affective words in response to the affectively-laden cartoon stories of the Chandler measure ($t(24) = 1.92$, $p < .05$); this relationship obtained even with general verbal skill partialled out ($r(24) = .37$, $p < .05$). It is difficult to imagine that an individual could effectively take the role of others without the initial ability to label their affective states, and the results of the present study would appear to support this conjecture. Contrary to

predictions, however, no relationship of perspective-taking with frequency of affective words in response to the Chandler task was found, nor was the perspective-taking child more likely than his non perspective-taking counterpart to use this enriched affective vocabulary in the natural setting.

Conceptually, one would expect a positive relationship between perspective-taking and age, since the perspective-taking construct is a developmental phenomenon. The relationship between age and scores on the Selman and Chandler measures was confirmed in this study ($r(23) = .52$, $p < .01$; $r(24) = .35$, $p < .05$, respectively). One would also expect a positive correlation between two instruments that purportedly measure the same construct. However, the correlation between the Selman and Chandler measures of perspective-taking was nonsignificant ($r = .21$). While measures of perspective-taking appear to have acceptable reliability, convergent validity has yet to be established (see reviews by Enright & Lapsley, 1980; Ford, 1979).

To summarize, the results of this study with a disturbed population validate global assumptions regarding the social bases for perspective-taking and perspectival children's interaction with peers vs. adults. Further, they provide partial support for an hypothesized relationship between perspective-taking and an affective vocabulary, and partially support the proposed relationship between perspective-taking and prosocial behavior.

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